# On Orientation

*Masonic Booklet No. 1*

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## *Publisher's Note*

Complying with the wishes of Co-Masons the American Branch of the Theosophical Publishing House has undertaken to publish a series of Masonic Booklets. These comprise papers compiled by entered apprentices, edited by more erudite members of the Rakoczy Lodge No. 523, Krotona.

In these booklets much and widely scattered material of instructive and fascinating character is being assembled, thus assisting the students of Masonry and Occultism. They will offer representative examples of Masonic influence and usages bearing on life in its complexity of causes and manifestation. To the casual reader they will bear witness to the loftiness and delicacy, as well as the profundity of thought and expression embodied in Masonry.

"Study eagerly the meaning of the hieroglyphics and emblems which the Order lays before thee. Even nature does not unveil its secrets; she must be observed, compared and frequently watched with attention in her operations."

—MASONIC EXHORTATIONS
FROM THE GERMAN.

# *Introduction*

The importance of ceremony is not fully appreciated and understood even by many masons. Perfection of form is important in all ritualistic work and should be insisted upon in the lodge, not only for the training of its members, but because it is a key that unlocks the storehouse of nature and enables those working to draw upon and make use of its hidden forces. These forces are living intelligences; by some they are called devas and nature spirits, by others angels and fairies. It does not matter what name is given them; but it is important to know that these intelligent forces are closely connected with the masonic ritual, and the great and wise Master who gave it to the world arranged it so that when the masonic ritual is properly carried out it automatically brings about an outflow of force which in its beneficent effect far surpasses that which could otherwise be produced by the united efforts of the members present.

## ON ORIENTATION

*Orientation is defined as "The Act of turning or being turned towards the East. The process of determining the East in taking bearings. The situation of a building relative to the points of the compass."

### *The East*

**"The East was always considered sacred by the ancients. In the earliest sacred rites, the Sun was the object of worship. When He arose to commence the day, in the East they associated this point with his Birth-place. Among the Hebrews, the East was looked upon with reverence. The camp of the tribe of Judah was placed in the East as a mark of distinction. The tabernacle in the wilderness was placed due east and west." This practice is continued in some of the Christian churches. The practice of primitive Christians and of some branches of the Christian church, is still to turn to the East in their devotions. It is well known that the East is the place where the R. W. M. sits and that it is the most honorable and distinguished place in the lodge.

*The 20th Century Dictionary on Orientation.
**Rev. F. M. Carey's book on "Free Masonry in All Ages," Page 277.

St. Augustin says the orientation of the early Christians is accounted for "because the East is the most honorable part of the world, being the region of light, whence the glorious Sun arises." In the old lectures on Masonry the Moon was represented as traveling from West to East,—that is, from darkness to light.

A Masonic writer says: "The veneration which Masons have for the East confirms the theory that it is from the East that the Masonic Cult proceeded, and that this bears a relation to the primitive religions whose first degeneration was Sun worship."

## *Masonry versus Materialism*

In reference to the degeneracy of religions, every mason should know that Masonry was given to men at a time when the great truth which had been set forth in the oriental religions was almost lost. Many had come to exaggerate the value of material things and there was danger of the knowledge of universal laws being lost entirely. The masses could no longer respond with understanding to the great ceremony. The Great Truths were left in the hands

of a worthy few to be held till they could again be spread broadcast. It was in these primitive religions which were established at this time when the essence was dropped and the form only held, that the sun was the first symbol to be recognized.

## *The Orient*

*Take the word Orient, which comes from the Latin participle "oriens," rising, i.e., the rising of the Sun—the East. The lodge, being a source of Light, is called the Orient or East; a Grand Body is called the "Grand East." Thus the Grand Lodge of France is called "Grand Orient." The title is applied to most of the Grand Bodies in Europe. Thus we see Orientation applied from the highest body to the first step in Masonry.

## *King Solomon's Temple*

Naturally, to the thoughtful person comes the question, Why the East? Why always turn to the East, even as the wise men of old who saw "His Star in the East" and bowed in worship before it. Why this traditional turning

*Gen. History and Cyclopædia of Masonry (Oliver Macoy).

to the East, found in all religions and philosophies from time immemorial? If the Bible stories are studied of King Solomon's Temple and the Tabernacle in the wilderness, making full allowance for the defective and corrupt texts, the disagreement of scholars, etc., it is found that certain points of construction and orientation have been preserved through the ages.

*In the Bible an account is given of the dimensions of King Solomon's Temple. In each reference one finds the orientation the same. Another interesting point along this line is the manner in which the East was carried out in King Solomon's Temple; the hill upon which the temple and royal buildings were erected was the eastern hill from Jerusalem, the one called Zion, which word means "sunny."

## *Mosque of Omar Oriented*

There is good reason for believing that the Sakhra or rock under the dome of the Mosque of Omar is the spot where the altar stood; the Mosque of Omar being built on the old site of the

*First Kings, 2nd chapter; Eze. 8th chapter: Exodus.

Temple. This is not a singular instance in which a Mohammedan house of worship has been proved to be oriented. On the contrary, all mosques, all over the country, have been found to be oriented carefully.

## *Palestinian Gilgals and Druidical Circles*

*In regard to King Solomon's Temple, "The Story of Solomon's Temple is not a mere chronicle of historical events—but a story written to symbolize the great events of the workings of the universe, to impress it upon the minds of the people in such a way that it would be indelibly fixed for all time. The symbolization of the universe by a temple edifice may be traced in the earliest Mesopotamian monuments. They were originally conceived as gigantic Sun dials constituted by erecting a circle of 12 upright stones round a central altar. These were the ancient Palestinian Gilgals and were the pattern for the later Druidical Circles."

It appears that many if not all ancient temples (including the ancient

Illustration from "Gilgals and Druidical Circles," page 50 on Rosicrucian Symbology.
*Scribner's Bible Dictionary, Vol. IV (Temple)

stone circles and avenues of Britain) were purposely oriented by their builders so that a particular star or the Sun itself should, at a fixed day or hour in the year, be seen during its movement across the heavens through an opening in the building especially designed for this purpose, so as to allow the light of the star to fall into the most sacred part of the temple, the "Naon" or "Holy of Holies."* At the moment of its appearance special ceremonies were performed by the priests and worshippers in the temple. The temple was dedicated to and carefully oriented to that particular star. Thus in ancient Greece the Pleiades, Sirius (the dog star), Spica and other stars were used; in Egypt, Capella, Canopus and Alpha Centauri; in Britain, Arcturus as well as those used by the Greeks. These temples were really astronomical observatories and were meant always to remain oriented to their special star, which must, if the earth were steady in its position, duly appear each year at the expected day and minute in the special window or

*American Freemason Nov., 1915. Ancient Temples and Reasons for Orientation, W. P. Hill.

aperture designed so as to allow the star then, and then only, to shine into the Temple."

This points to one thing, i. e., that all the initiated priests and men of wisdom made great efforts to symbolize the plan of the universe.

## *Star-Worship in Egypt*

Now turn to the ancient land of Khem and remember that the V:. of S:. K:. says, "Out of Egypt have I called my sons," for that Land of Mystery holds many secrets.

*In that most beautiful of the Platonic dialogues known as the Timæus, Solon, is represented as conversing with the Egyptian priest, and asks how it is that Egypt has preserved so marvelous a knowledge of the past and is so rich in wisdom, while the rest of the world, even his beloved Greece, was in a state of relative barbarism. The priest tells him that Egypt, owing to her geographical position, has never been subject to the cataclysms of fire, flood and earthquake that have successively overwhelmed all the other nations, wiping out their records and destroying their

*"The Faith of Ancient Egypt," by Sidney G. P. Coryn.

traditions; that as a result she possesses the stored wisdom of 50,000 years. For one proof of this claim, and there are many, turn to the great zodiac pictured upon the ceiling of the temple at Denderah. Examine its hundreds of figures, each one still palpitating with symbolic meaning; the ideographs upon that zodiac and upon the papyrii indicate that when that great picture was painted the Sun was in the sign of the Virgin at the Spring Equinox and that it had returned to that sign three times within the observations of their priests. The precession of the equinoctial points around the zodiacal circle occupies twenty-five thousand nine hundred and twenty years (modern astronomers disagree a little as to the exact number of years, some giving it as twenty-five thousand nine hundred for the precession).

For more on this subject see appendix.

## *Occult Value of Exact Orientation*

These references have shown that the temple buildings were so placed that a certain star would shine into a particular room in the Temple when the star was in a definite position. To achieve this, the great astronomers

found it necessary to make careful calculations. With the aid of these tabulations they were able to foretell the exact number of years required by each star for its return to this particular spot.

*This was all done so accurately that the ancients, in order to orient their buildings, often waited 800 years to make the orientation exact, and it is noticeable that those silent witnesses in stone are standing today in all their grandeur. Therefore we might at least see to it today that our temples are oriented in so far as we are able to do so, for there are reasons that we will surely understand in time.

If it be impossible to have the lodge room properly oriented as to points of the compass one can still gain much through the interpretation of the symbols and by learning how to do the masonic work, this preparatory to the time when one may be so fortunate as to have the opportunity of taking part in ceremonials conducted in a lodge which has its East in true accord with the points of the compass.

A true workman would hardly at-

*See Appendix.

tempt to perform real magic in a lodge not properly oriented because he would have to make so much greater effort by working against the currents of nature, and so if his Lodge be not correctly oriented he is working against nature and not with her.

## APPENDIX

"When our calendar was formed, the Sun at the spring Equinox was in the sign Aries; as from Aries to Virgo is six signs, it is fourteen thousand years since the Sun was in Virgo at the Equinox. But that was the third appearance of the Sun in that sign and for the Sun to be three times in the sign Virgo requires a period of at least sixty-two thousand years or at most eighty-seven thousand years. So the Denderah zodiac makes the same claim that the Egyptian priest made to Solon.

### *Occult Chronology of Egypt*

If we are to understand the occult chronology of Egypt a comprehension of the equinoctial changes is essential to us. We are all familiar with the fact that the broad path of the ecliptic or the zodiac is the apparent course of the Sun and the actual course of the planets around the Sun. It is evident that if the earth maintained an upright position as she traveled around the circle of the ecliptic, the terrestrial poles would correspond with the poles of the ecliptic; but, as the earth has her poles tilted away from the poles of the eclip-

tic, the plane of the earth's equator does not correspond with the plane of the ecliptic. The precession of the equinox is therefore caused by the movement of the pole of the equator and it is this movement that occupies twenty-five thousand nine hundred years; it is the shifting round the circle with each revolution of the terrestrial pole. This circle of the ecliptic is divided into the twelve signs of the zodiac; each sign measures thirty degrees and the equinoctial points remain in each degree seventy-two years, making it an easy matter to calculate the date of any ancient event where the position of the Sun at the Vernal Equinox is given." So, as we begin to understand the signs and symbols of old Egypt, we discover how perfectly oriented each and every temple building was.

## *The Great Pyramid*

Let us note a few examples: the Great Pyramid built by the astronomer Monarch Khufu about 4235 B. C.—that is to say, within a few years of the foundation of the hieroglyphic kalendar—has its single shaft which gives entrance to the interior inclined up

ward so that it emerges at about fifty feet from the bottom, being inclined upward at such an angle as to point (according to measurements confirmed by Professor Flinders Petrie), to the position occupied by the pole star between five and six thousand years ago. If we calculate the position which would be occupied by the Moon at the epoch of the opening of the kalendar, when at the farthest distance from the ecliptic compatible with the eclipse it will be found to be vertical to the latitude of Luxor. And what is even more remarkable as relating to an epoch long antecedent to the foundation of the kalendar, the farthest limit ever attained by the Sun (according to the calculation published by the Smithsonian Institute at Washington) through the variation of the ecliptic is about 24° 33′, and that latitude is marked by the venerable temple of Omoos.

## *Temple of Denderah*

The temple at Denderah was built where it stands because this locality is close to the tropics where the plane of our orbit passes perpendicularly upward

through the surface of the earth. The records tell us how the original was erected by Pepi, a monarch of the sixth dynasty—for the plan upon which Pepi religiously carried out the ancient temple did not originate in his own mind, but was brought to light by him from a crypt or secret chamber, being written "in archaic characters," say the records, by Khufu himself, the astronomer-architect of the fourth dynasty, and buried by him on the spot eight hundred years before the days of Pepi. If then an observer at Denderah should stand with his face toward the north, as the temple records inform us that the founder stood, when on the night of midsummer he laid the foundation-stone of the building, he would have the plane of our orbit rising immediately in front of him, while the pole of the ecliptic would lie at his feet at the farthest verge of the celestial horizon." When we compare the temple and the Great Pyramid (the one erected by Khufu, the other designed to wait for the fullness of time for its accomplishment), let us see why the entrance shaft of the Great Pyramid was 26° 7′ above the horizon

of the building, and 26° 7′ is the latitude of Denderah. The star's true distance from the pole was 3° 53′; the date at which the pole star occupied the position, as thus indicated, was about 3440 B. C., eight centuries after Khufu's time. Pepi, who himself bore the title of Grand Master (Sechem Ur.) recognized the signal that the hour had arrived for the manifestation of that design when the star which indicated the celestial pole illuminated the dark masonry of the twin building and he saw the point "shining in the great house of watching," as it says in another part of the inscription. Until that hour should come, the Grand Architect concealed the design for the temple of the universe; when the predetermined measure of time was accomplished, the Grand Master erected the building on the spot measured by the star and the pole of the heavens."

(Quotations from "The Book of the Master," by W. Marsham Adams, formerly Fellow of New College, Oxford.)